

is a great pleasure to have him speak on this most important amendment.

Mr. SKELTON. Madam Chairman, I first must say how very proud I am of the chairman of the subcommittee, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER), how proud I am of our ranking member, the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE) for the work that they did on the personnel section of this bill. The work that they provided for us, and hopefully we will have a strong vote on this entire bill at a later moment today, will give encouragement, will give heart, to those who are in the military and have some doubts as to whether they should stay and serve our Nation in uniform or to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

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The pay package, which includes the pay raise, the pay tables, the pension package, it will encourage so many to stay and seek retirement later than leaving. I just cannot compliment the gentlemen enough. I want this House to know of my praise for the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER) and the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE) on the fine work they have done.

Let me also add that I support this amendment that they have offered. It was first brought to my attention by the Chief of Naval Personnel, and it is an excellent amendment. It is a key part of the full package that will be comprising the personnel section of this bill.

The military is the largest employer that does not offer a 401(k) plan. However, we do offer this benefit to Federal civilian employees under the Thrift Savings Plan. As a government, we should strive for equity among the different types of employees. I fully support this. It is equity on the Federal level among all different types of employees, soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines who leave before completing 20 years will not leave empty-handed, but be able to take the Thrift Savings Plan with them into another 401(k) plan.

This is the right thing to do for the young people as they grow in service and in maturity. I fully support, fully support this amendment.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Madam Chairman, with the Chair's permission and with the indulgence of the gentleman from Indiana, there was a request by a Member to speak, and I ask unanimous consent to extend the debate by 1 minute.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore (Mrs. EMERSON). The Chair would entertain that request if it were equally divided, 1 minute on both sides.

Mr. SKELTON. Madam Chairman, I move to strike the last word.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. Does the gentleman from Hawaii withdraw his unanimous consent request?

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Yes, Madam Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) will be recognized to 5 minutes.

Mr. SKELTON. Madam Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE).

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Madam Chairman, I request that the time that has been yielded to me be divided, 2½ minutes each to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER) and myself.

The CHAIRMAN pro tempore. The gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) does have the 5 minutes under the 5-minute rule.

Mr. SKELTON. I will be pleased to yield to the gentleman from Indiana at the proper time.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Madam Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. TRAFICANT).

Mr. TRAFICANT. Madam Chairman, I did not realize we were going to have such a complicated and convoluted situation here.

I think what the gentlemen are doing, I say to the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER), is absolutely necessary. I think when we do the little things, the big things take care of themselves.

I had not really looked carefully at this amendment, but having looked at this amendment, it is the types of little things that build morale and stabilization to a military force that is deserv- ing.

I just wanted to echo here and compliment the chairman, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER) and the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE) and the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. SKELTON) and all associated with this.

Mr. SKELTON. Madam Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE).

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Madam Chairman, in closing, I would like to thank the subcommittee staff for their very hard work. Additionally, I would like to thank my colleague, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER). It has been a pleasure to work with him, to develop such a comprehensive benefits package that I am certain will ensure the viability of the all-volunteer force well into the next century.

Mr. SKELTON. Madam Chairman, I yield to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER).

Mr. BUYER. I thank the gentleman for yielding to me, Madam Chairman, and for his contribution and that of the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. ABERCROMBIE).

One of the challenges associated with recruiting the high quality military force that we possess today are the demands the force places on personnel programs within the uniformed services.

Military men and women today are bright, confident, and they are honorable young people. If these superb young people were anything less than the best, they would not measure up to the extreme challenges that we call on them to overcome each and every day as they serve the Nation around the world.

This high quality force includes members that are more independent and savvy than we have seen in the past. They understand the importance of saving for retirement and they want to control their future.

We have observed a revolution in investment that has changed the retirement planning in the private sector, and those in the military services want to participate in a strong economy that has benefited some others in America. For example, they want the same 30 percent rate of return that 1.8 million Federal civilian employees enjoyed today from their Thrift Savings program. They want some retirement portability that they do not have today within the military retirement system. In short, they want to participate in the Thrift Savings Plan.

While this, again, is no silver bullet that guarantees good recruiting and retention, we must not allow this powerful, cost-effective recruiting and retention tool to go unused. The readiness of the force depends on our action today.

I urge that the administration would include this in the 2001 budget. I urge my colleagues to vote "yes" on the Buyer-Abercrombie amendment. I urge my colleagues to provide the uniformed services access to the Thrift Savings Plan.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Military Personnel, Mr. BUYER and the gentleman from Hawaii, Mr. ABERCROMBIE for introduction of this amendment to provide all members of our uniformed services with the opportunity to participate in a Thrift Savings Plan. This proposal mirrors legislation that was introduced by me and the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. PICKETT last year and again this year as H.R. 556.

It is not only reasonable but also fair that those who serve our nations armed forces should be eligible for personal savings plans available to other federal employees and Members of Congress. Today when our military pay falls behind cost of living, other federal worker pay and benefits it is essential that Congress provide our military services with additional incentives for recruitment and retention.

With recruitment down, and re-enlistments dropping we must reexamine both the compensation, living conditions and benefits offered our military personnel.

This action today is only one change of many needed to address problems and challenges facing our military and their dependents. It has been my privilege to work with others to help enact this savings plan and I urge its adoption as this military authorization legislation moves forward.

This action will also compliment legislation that I helped to author last year that begins to open our federal employees health benefit program to our military retirees and their dependents.

Mr. ABERCROMBIE. Mr. Chairman, I rise today in support of the Buyer-Abercrombie amendment to provide, in law, a provision for disability separation and retirement for service members with pre-existing conditions. This amendment is one of the en-bloc amendments.

Current law does not include a standard to establish eligibility for disability retirement and